West Howard Avenue

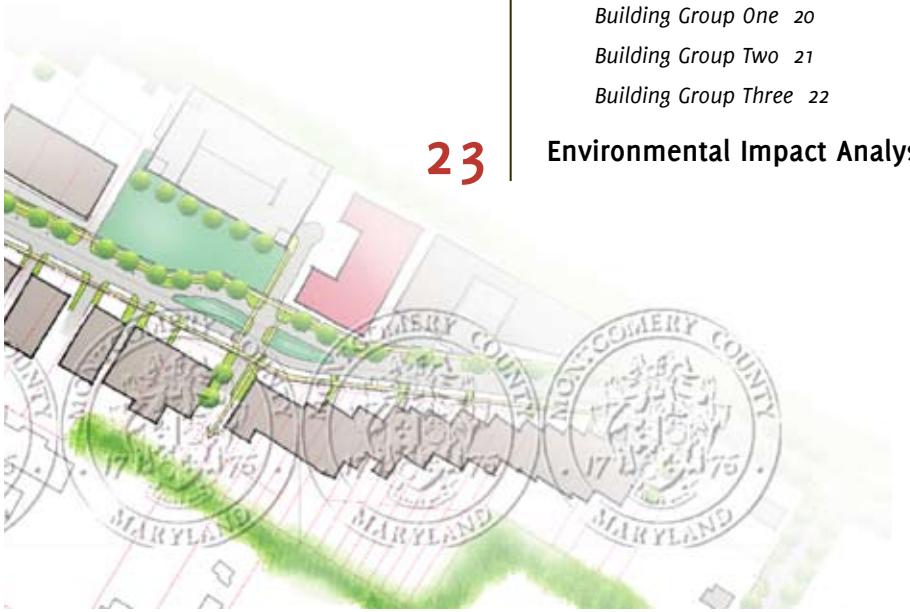
Urban Design Study

Kensington, Maryland

Montgomery County
Department of Housing and
Community Affairs

October 2009

Table of Contents



hord | coplan | macht

750 E. Pratt Street, Suite 1100 Baltimore, MD 21202
410.837.7311 | www. hcm2.com

Limits of Study Area

Executive Summary

West Howard Avenue is an active and diverse business community located in Kensington, Maryland. It is composed of antique retailers, home improvement stores, auto repair workshops, catering services and other businesses to name a few. While there is synergy among antique retailers and related services and businesses, there are also varied uses. However all of these businesses play an important part in the local and regional economy due to the community's central location.

This business community, referred to locally as West Howard Avenue, is a collection of mid-twentieth century industrial buildings straddled along a segment of Howard Avenue. These typical two-story, masonry structures were intended for light industrial uses and warehousing. Most facades are unadorned and principally utilitarian, with loading docks and service bays at the ground level. Access to the buildings are from various sides of the structures. These structures are showing their age with cosmetic and minor structural deterioration. Buildings lack graphic signage standards and lighting (building and site).

Other than being framed by two-story structures, West Howard Avenue has a relatively undefined street edge. Street trees, curbs, and sidewalks, which typically frame traditional streets, are missing from this segment of West Howard Avenue. Instead, asphalt and concrete run contiguously between buildings and West Howard Avenue. Motorized vehicles have free reign to move throughout the study area, with few limitations such as retaining walls and utilities. Most of the open space is impervious and intended for parking and storage. Utility poles and fire hydrants run along the south side of West Howard Avenue, without a buffer from vehicles. Trash dumpsters are located throughout the study area and are highly visible along West Howard Avenue. Pedestrians lack basic amenities like safe grade-separated sidewalks or clearly marked crosswalks.

The topography is a defining physical feature. West Howard Avenue follows a valley, where the periphery of the study area sits on higher ground. Since a majority of the land is impervious, rain runoff collects and carries pollutants and high volumes of water. For the most part, runoff is discharged directly, without storm water controls, into an eroding stream channel flowing towards Rock Creek.

Located in the heart of Montgomery County, West Howard Avenue is a distinct place. The traditional industrial context and diversity of businesses makes it a unique destination. This study provides strategies to enhance building facades and site features that are in keeping with the eclectic and industrial character that is already present.

West Howard Avenue is heavily characterized by vehicular and service needs, with few safe options for pedestrians. The open space is defined by parking, storage and utilities. This study provides a street framework to accommodate a more balanced circulation pattern that meets the County's road design standards, strives to satisfy current and future parking needs, and makes this business district a safer place for pedestrians.

Site and building improvements should address environmental stewardship. The industrial legacy of West Howard Avenue has created a place absent of vegetation and pervious grounds. Buildings were constructed without consideration for energy efficiency or healthy working spaces. This study also provides strategies for stormwater management and recommendations for sustainable building improvements.

Introduction

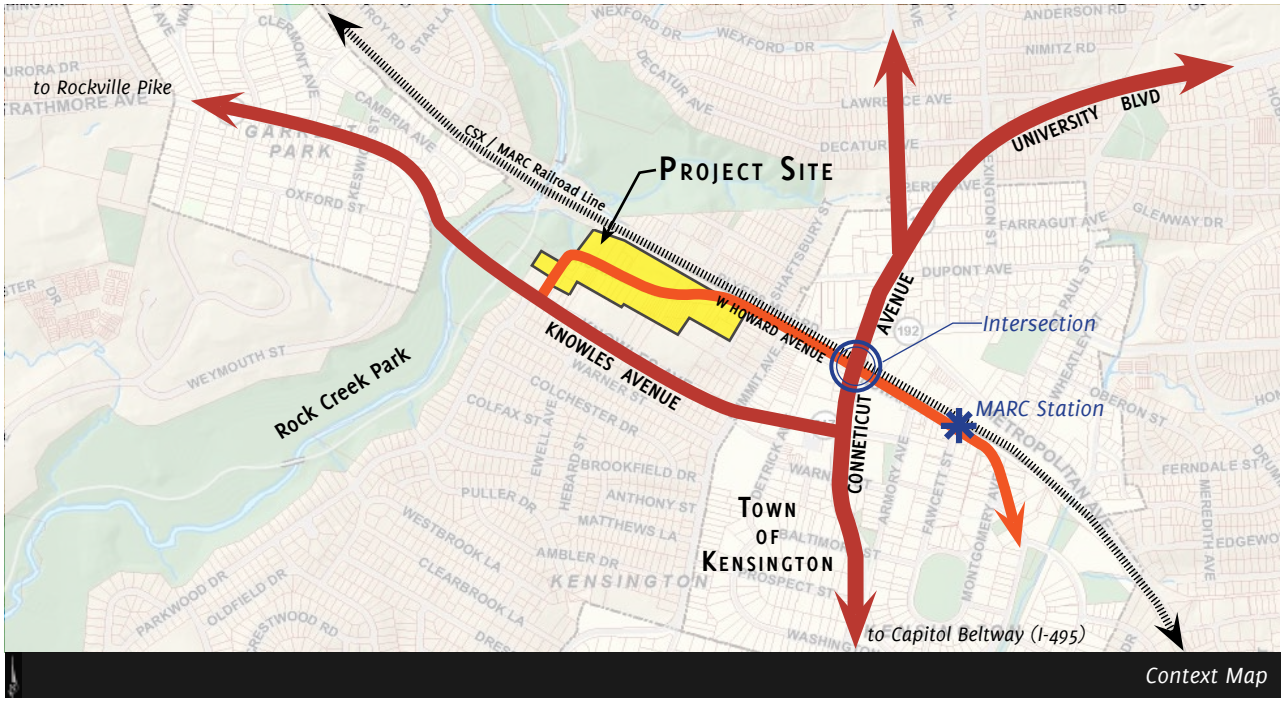
Stakeholders Meeting

| Overview |

The Montgomery County Department of Housing and Community Affairs (DHCA) has undertaken this urban design study for the West Howard Avenue area adjacent to the incorporated Town of Kensington, Maryland. The West Howard Avenue study area is comprised of an eclectic mix of businesses including antique retailers, antique-related services and auto repair workshops within a light industrial neighborhood. Although an active place, the area lacks a cohesive theme, is generally unattractive and has drainage problems. DHCA has commissioned the consultant team comprised of Hord Coplan Macht and Loiederman Soltesz Associates to recommend an urban design strategy for physical improvements to building facades and related site conditions. In particular, this study will address typical architectural façade improvements to the existing buildings, streetscape improvements, parking and service suggestions, area drainage improvements and potential sustainability strategies.

| Process |

This urban design study was prepared utilizing an open and inclusive process. The first phase included information gathering, followed by a detailed site and building analysis. The results of the analysis phase were presented to various stakeholder groups for comment and feedback. The consultant team synthesized the initial feedback and prepared draft recommendations. The draft recommendations were then presented back to the stakeholder groups for additional feedback. Final recommendations have been prepared and represented in this final report.



Neighborhood Context

The 15 acre study area is generally located east of Rock Creek Park south of the CSX/MARC rail line and west of Connecticut Avenue (MD Route 185). Specifically, the area studied is confined along both sides of West Howard Avenue between Knowles Avenue (MD Route 547) and Warfield Street. The study area also includes properties located on a portion of the west side of Warfield Street. The study area is immediately west and outside of the corporate limits of the Town of Kensington.

Originally platted as part of the B. H. Warner's Addition to Kensington in 1909, the street and block pattern has been modified with the creation of the current West Howard Avenue alignment and the re-subdivision of the residential neighborhood south of Knowles Avenue. The majority of the buildings were built in the 1950s and 1960s. Given the proximity to the railroad tracks, it is assumed that they were intended for industrial uses.

Antiques District Sign at Connecticut Avenue

Antiques Shop


Antiques Shop


Auto Repair

Site Analysis

West Howard Avenue's site and building conditions were documented and analyzed. The analysis included observing circulation patterns, identifying parking and storage areas, understanding topography and drainage, reviewing zoning and planning documents, documenting business activities, evaluating building facades and their physical conditions and analyzing the general character.

West Howard Avenue is an industrial and eclectic place, where a variety of businesses prosper. This collection of businesses are centrally located within Montgomery County and provide vital services. Some underdeveloped parcels, like the State Highway Administration (SHA) property, provide opportunities for redevelopment. The utiliarian nature of many of buildings floor plans offer potential adaptive reuse opportunities. For example, converting warehouse space into office and retail space. Site drainage issues, severe topographical conditions and conflicts between pedestrians, motorized vehicles and utilities are examples of some of the challenges this business community faces.

To summarize the findings of the site and building analysis, the following opportunities and constraints were developed and presented to stakeholders:

Opportunities

- Synergy among land uses
- Potential redevelopment, adaptive reuse and/or expansion opportunities, such as the SHA site
- Zoning permits non-residential uses
- Momentum for organized business associations
- Central location within the County
- Exterior building improvements easier to implement than street improvements.

Constraints

- Site drainage issues (e.g. lack of storm water management)
- Conflicts between pedestrians, automobiles, service and utilities
- Lack of pedestrian amenities
- Non-traditional mix of businesses
- Inconsistent and narrow building face-to-street edge relationship
- Undefined street edge
- Severe topographical conditions
- Some incompatible and undesirable land uses
- Absentee property owners

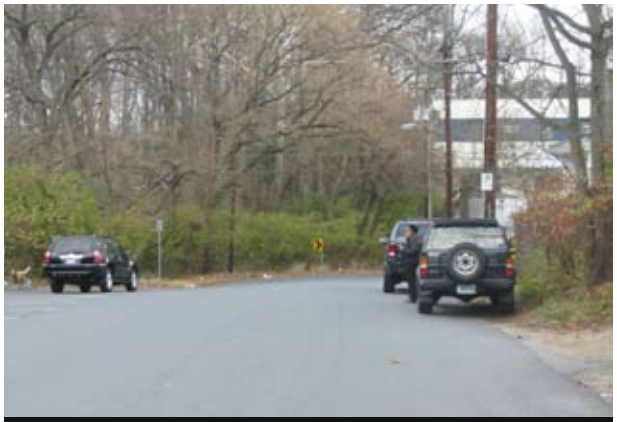
Warfield Street

State Highway Administration Property

Typical Business

Tree in Parking Lot

View of West Howard Avenue



1. *View of West Howard near Knowles Avenue*

2. *View of West Howard Looking West*

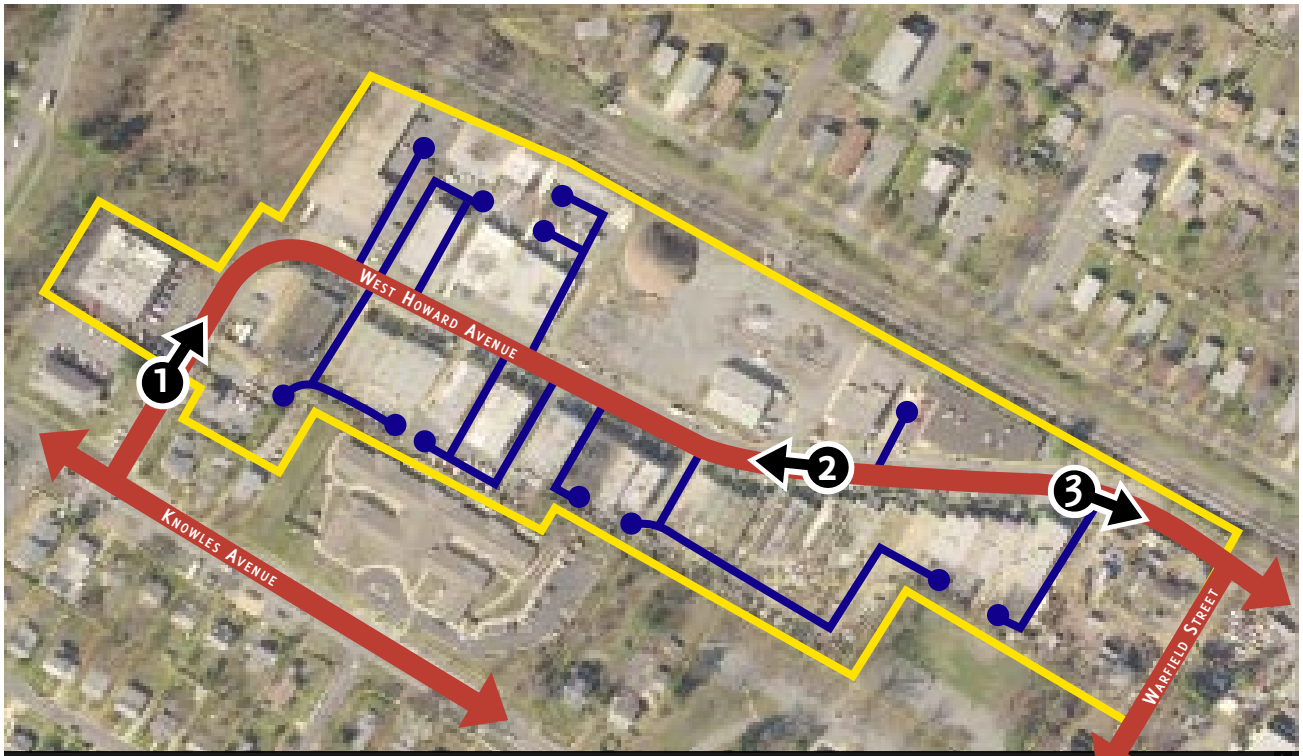
3. *View of West Howard looking towards Warfield Street*

| Vehicular Circulation |

The business community is organized along the spine of West Howard Avenue, between Warfield Street and Knowles Avenue. The only two entry points for the business community are located at the intersection of West Howard with the afore mentioned streets.

The business community is visibly removed from major arterial streets, like Knowles and Connecticut Avenue. To compensate, there exists a prominently sized sign located at the intersection of West Howard Avenue and Connecticut Avenue. However this intersection has limited movement onto Connecticut Avenue and allows no clear connection between the Antique Row on the east side of Connecticut Avenue. From Knowles Avenue, there is little to no signage directing people to this business community.

The character of West Howard Avenue changes between Warfield Street and Knowles Avenue. Near the entrances to the study area, West Howard is fronted by fewer buildings, and the edge of the street terminates on an earthen or gravel shoulder, overall a more suburban street presence.



Circulation Diagram: (numbers reference photo to the left)

Typical Rear Access Drive with Steep Grades

West Howard Avenue has a distinctive industrial street character, between Sparrows Antiques, at the top of the hill on the eastside, and the sharp bend in the street near the western and lower end of the study area. The buildings are industrial with utilities and services not hidden from view. The study area is nearly all impervious.

Vehicles have fairly unlimited and unobstructed access from the travel lanes to adjacent buildings. There lacks clear separation between vehicles and pedestrians. This setting works well in an exclusively industrial setting, but can be problematic in a shared user environment. From general observations some vehicles use West Howard as a through-street between Knowles and Summit Avenue. On occassion these vehicles operate at high speeds, causing potential conflicts with turning vehicles, trucks and pedestrians. A painted white line is one of the few elements that separates through-traffic from properties, parking and service areas.

| Service Drives |

Service drives between buildings and along the rear side of most buildings provide access to businesses located on the upper levels and to building entrances located to the rear. In general, the service drives are on private land and do not conform to a specific design standard. There are various widths and configurations. Dumpsters, storage lots and parking spaces are arranged in an unorganized fashion along these service drives. Most of the service drives terminate in a deadend, forcing vehicles to make a three-point turn around to get back to West Howard Avenue.

Dumpsters Along West Howard

Power Lines Aligned Along West Howard

Fire Hydrants

Trash Removal Under Low Power Lines

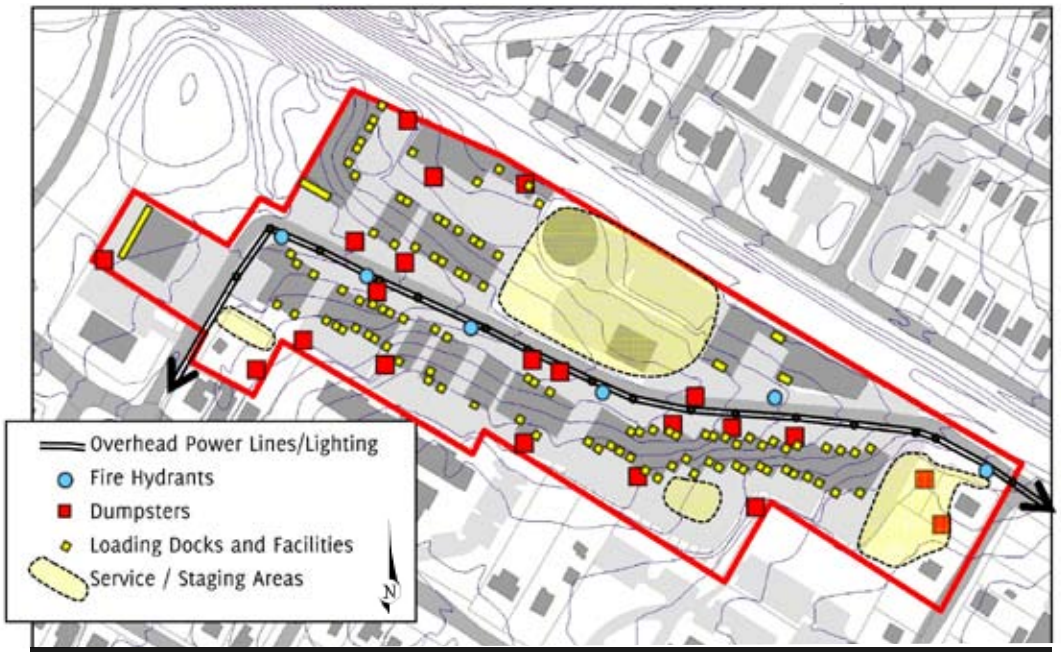
| Utilities & Services |

Utilities, such as fire hydrants and power lines, as well as dumpsters and loading docks, are located in prominantly along West Howard Avenue.

Overhead electrical power is located along the south side of West Howard Avenue, with secondary electrical lines running overhead along the service drives providing electrical service to businesses located off of West Howard. Fire hydrants are located along the south side of West Howard. With limited curbs, many utility poles and fire hydrants stand unprotected from vehicles. In some cases, curbs are introduced around a hydrant to provide protection. Other protective strategies include placing orange cones to warn vehicles of utility poles.

Dumpsters are located throughout the study area, with many located along West Howard Avenue. The location of dumpsters along West Howard competes with parking spaces and creates conflicts between service vehicles, cars and pedestrians. Dumpsters adjacent to power lines have overhead limitations from utility lines.

Many of the buildings still operate as industrial uses and occassionally utilize their existing loading docks. While loading areas are important to many of the businesses, they also present limitations for providing customer parking close to building entrances and may be a height barrier for pedestrian access.



Utility Plan

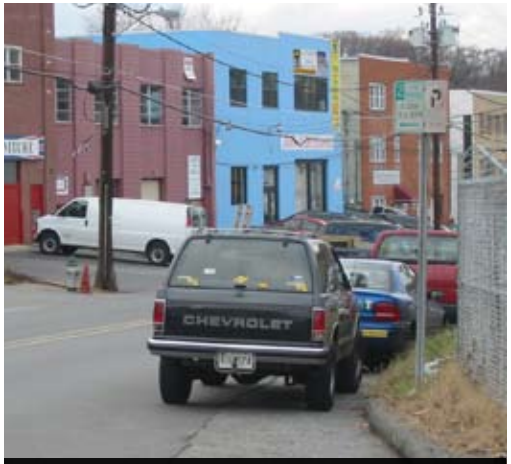
| Pedestrian Circulation |

Designated pedestrian walks within the study area are limited to a few locations along the apron of buildings. Pedestrians navigate throughout the site maneuvering around trash dumpsters, retaining walls, parked and moving cars as welll as service vehicles.

Minimal dimensions between buildings provide limited opportunities to provide sidewalks while accommodating parking, service and vehicular through-traffic. Steep grades provide another obstacle, particularly for people walking along service drives to rear businesses.

Informal paths can be found throughout the study area, indicating where people desire to walk. Many of these paths are located between the study area and adjacent neighborhoods. Examples of these paths can be found along the southern shoulder of West Howard between Sparrows Antiques and Warfield Street and between the library site and the rear service area of study site. Just beyond the study area, streets accommodate pedestrian movement. For example, Knowles Avenue and West Howard Avenue, east of Summit Avenue, have sidewalks with clearly marked pedestrian crosswalks, while Beach Drive has a hiker/biker path.

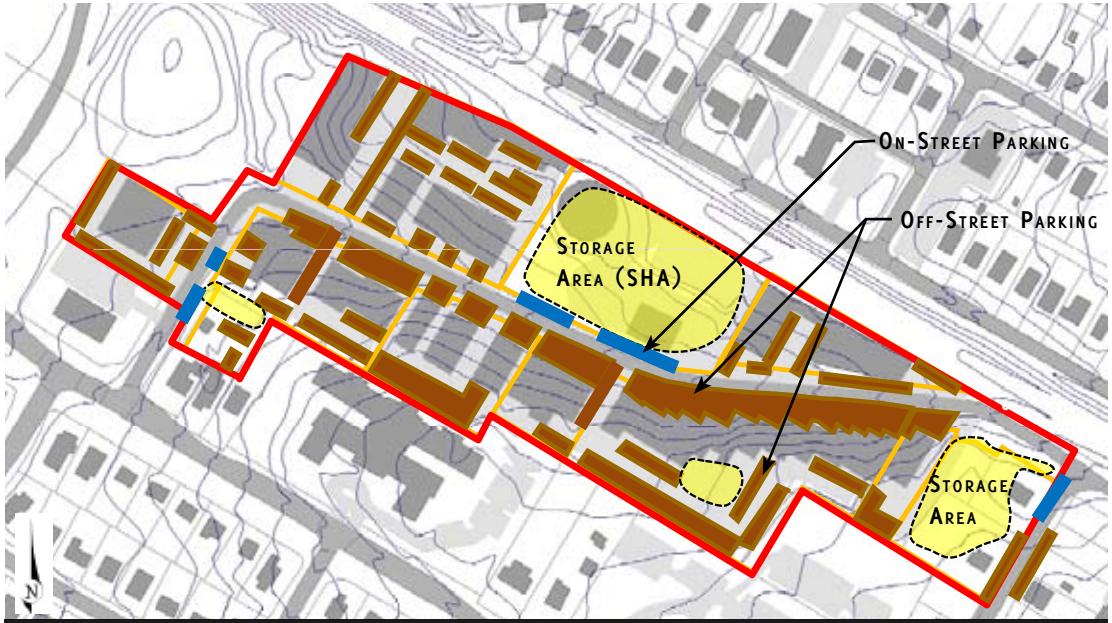
Uneven Pavement



Limited Sight Lines

Hiker/Biker Trail Along Beach Drive In Rock Creek Park

Informal Path Along West Howard Near Warfield Street



Parking Plan

On-Street Parking-	± 27 Spaces
Off-Street Parking-	± 507 Spaces
Total	± 534 Spaces

Existing Parking

(This parking inventory is an estimate of existing parking based on site observations and excludes auto storage and loading areas.)

| Parking |

In general, there are three different types of parking arrangements found in the West Howard Antiques District. These parking arrangements range from the standardized and regulated to non-standardized and informal layouts.

On-street parallel parking, the most regulated arrangement, is limited to a few locations along West Howard Avenue and on Warfield Street. These unmetered spaces are enforced by Montgomery County with street signage.

Off-street parking, located outside of the right-of-way, can be categorized as designated and non-designated.

Designated off-street parking areas have painted parking stalls. Examples of this parking type can be found along the north and west sides of West Howard. Although these spaces are striped, this does not guarantee that the existing parking spaces meet County standards.

Non-designated off-street parking is common along the south side of West Howard Avenue and in the service drives to the rear of these properties. These parking areas lack painted stalls and clear travel lanes. Instead, spaces are defined by physical features such as retaining walls, utility poles and dumpsters.

Auto storage (often double parked) and staging areas tend to be located to the rears of buildings, however some parking spaces along West Howard Avenue may serve as short-term staging, particularly for auto-related businesses.

A few parcels are vacant of structures and used for storage of equipment and materials. The SHA site and the landscape construction storage area on Warfield Street are two of the largest under-improved areas. While these businesses may need the area for the services they provide, they may not be the highest and best use for this business community. These sites offer potential redevelopment opportunities.

Designated On-street Parking- Parallel Spaces on West Howard

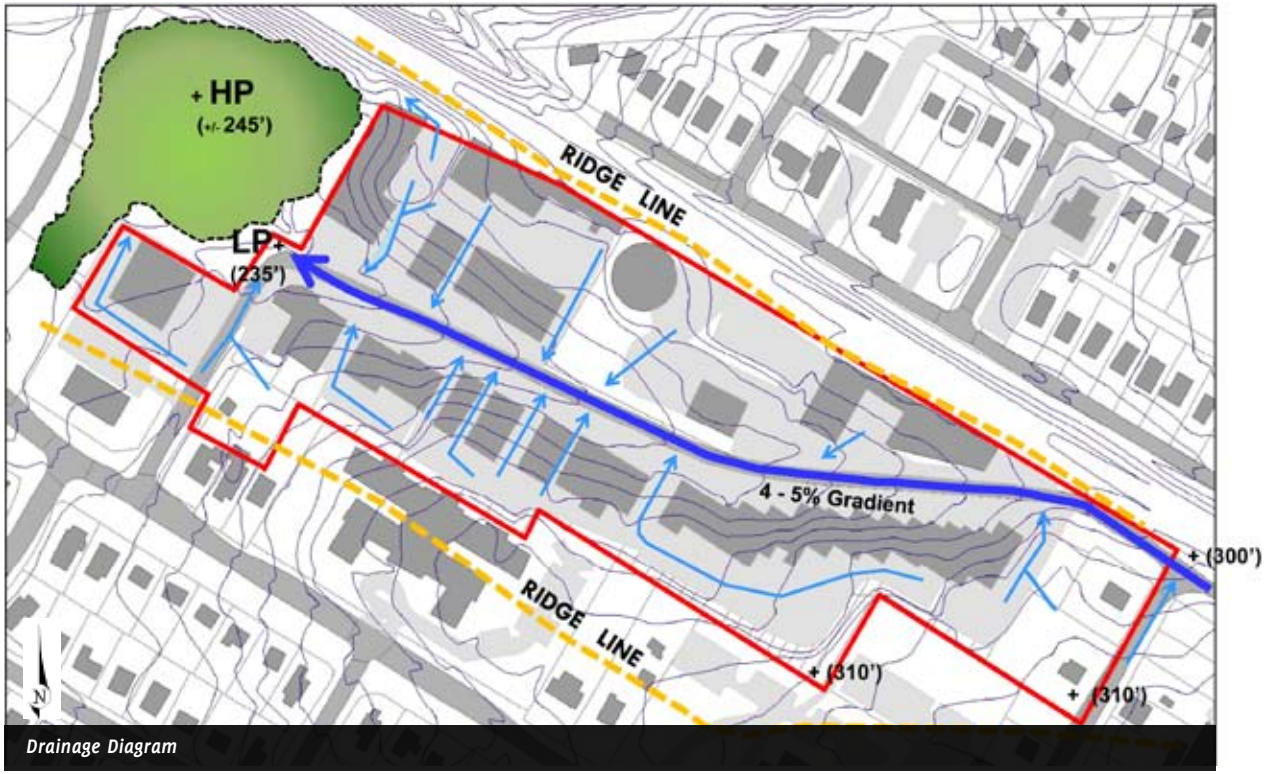
Designated Off-street Parking

Auto Storage Area

Non-designated Off-street Parking Along West Howard

Non-designated Off-street Parking Along Rear Service Drives

SHA Property

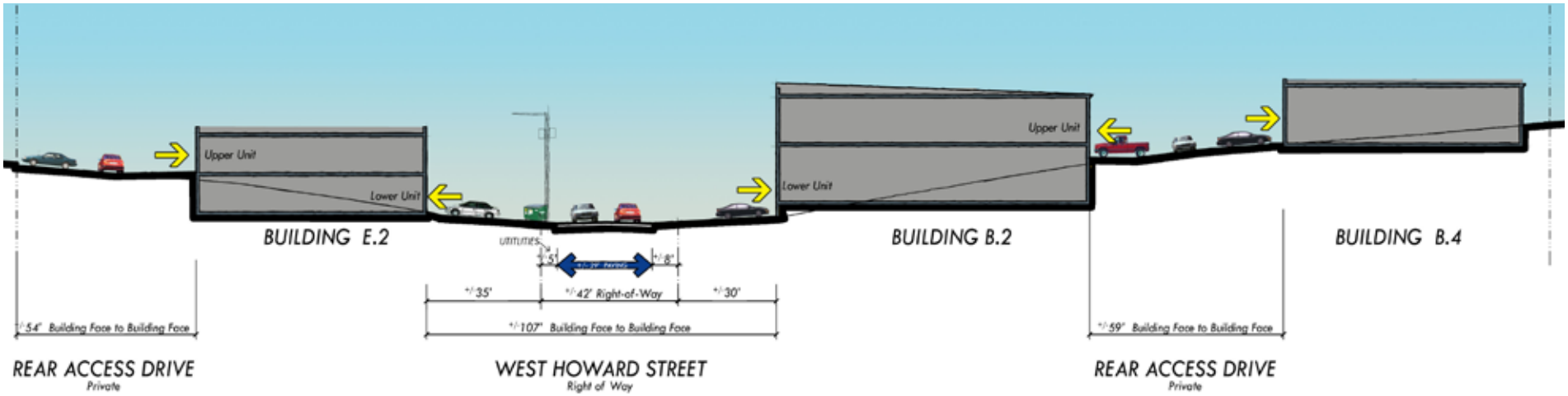


Drainage Diagram

| Topography & Drainage |

The study area is shaped by topography. West Howard Avenue descends at a 4-5 % gradient from Warfield Street to Knowles Avenue. The highest point is located in the southeast corner of the study area and the lowest point is at the sharp bend in West Howard Avenue. The northern and southern boundaries of the study area follow parallel ridge lines, while the street aligns in a valley between ridge lines.

Additionally, the buildings are shaped by topography. The long axis of buildings follow the contours, acting as a retaining wall where the building face along West Howard Avenue (low side) is two stories high and the rear face of the same building (high side) is a single story. For these buildings, upper level businesses typically enter from the building's rear, while the lower level businesses enter from West Howard Avenue.



Site Section

Generally, water runoff drains from the northern, southern and eastern periphery (high points) of the study area towards the bend in West Howard Avenue (low point). Since most of the land surface in the study area is impermeable, runoff moves from roof-tops, across the ground surface and towards West Howard Avenue. Within the street, runoff flows down the edge of the travelway towards the low point discharging into a wooded area, where noticeable erosion has occurred. Runoff is diverted into a semi-naturalized water channel that is conveyed through the wooded area towards Rock Creek, a tributary of the Potomac River. As a result, water discharges pollutants such as oil and chemicals causing potential damage to natural waterways.

Runoff Along West Howard Avenue


Downspout Discharging To Service Drive

Steep Slopes On Service Drives


Steep Slopes Between West Howard And Buildings

Existing Zoning Diagram

| Zoning |

The study area is comprised primarily of light industrial, warehousing and retail uses found in four separate zoning designations. The existing land uses are reflective of the underlying zoning. The surrounding neighborhood uses include parkland, civic, senior housing, single family homes and commercial uses. The zoning categories in the study area are as follows:

- I-1 (Light Industrial)
- 0-M (Office Building, Moderate Intensity)
- C-T (Commercial, Transitional)
- R-60 (Residential, One Family)

The zoning designation for land surrounding the study area is primarily R-60 to the south, north and west. Properties east of Summit Avenue are zoned G-2.

The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission is currently preparing zoning recommendations for the study area as part of the upadte for the *Town of Kensington and Vicinty Sector Plan Update*

| Approved & Adopted Sector Plan |

The Approved and Adopted Sector Plan for the Town of Kensington and Vicinity (1978) proposes recommendations for street right-of-way improvements and land uses. On a parallel course with this planning study, M-NCPPC is preparing an update to this Sector Plan.

Right-of-Way Recommendation

The approved Sector Plan recommends that West Howard Avenue between Connecticut Avenue and Knowles Avenue be classified as an arterial road. The standard right-of-way width for an arterial road is an 80-foot section. Currently, this goal has not been achieved since West Howard's right-of-way varies in width.

The expansion of the right-of-way to 80 feet will have an impact on private properties and businesses within the study area. The County will have to acquire portions of private property to widen the right-of-way. In some locations where the building-to-building distance across West Howard Avenue is less than 80 feet, these buildings are within the proposed right-of-way. In other instances, the expansion of the right-of-way may change the slopes between buildings and street. With less distance between the street right-of-way and buildings, new grading conditions may require steeper slopes and possibly retaining walls.

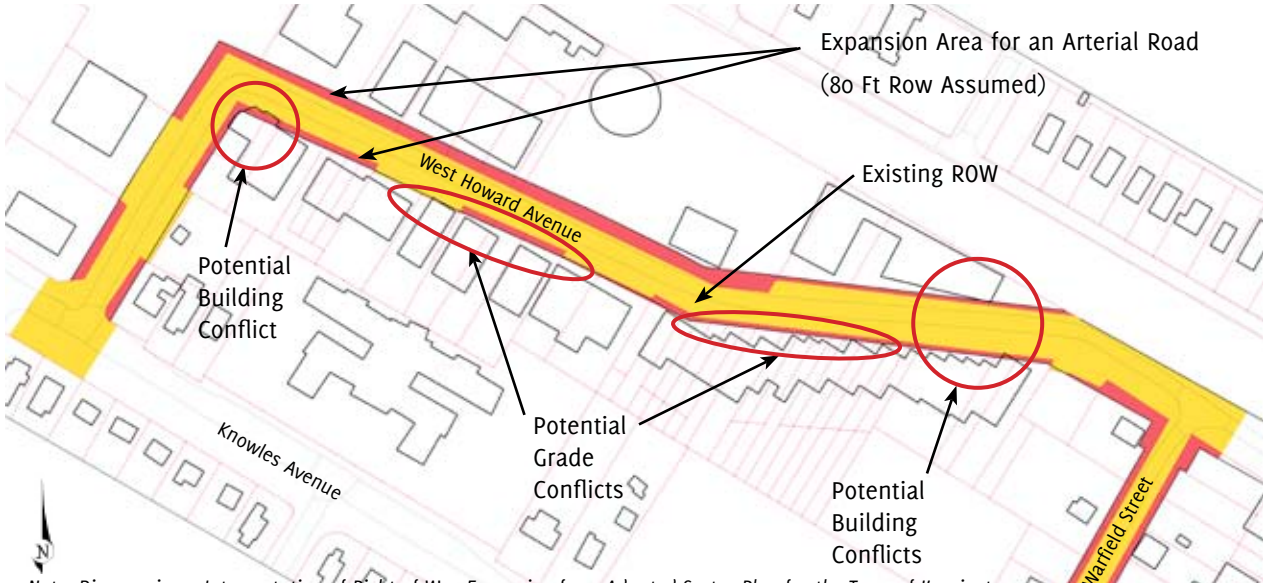
Land Use

The approved Sector Plan recommends that light industrial land uses be retained. The approved Sector Plan recommends the parcel at the southwest corner of Warfield Street and West Howard Avenue to be rezoned to a light industrial category.

Currently there are two areas within this industrially zoned area that are residentially zoned (R-60). Based on the vision of the approved Sector Plan to retain light industrial land, these residential areas should be rezoned light industrial (I-1) to conform with adjacent land uses. Additionally, there are a few properties with multiple zones (split zoned).

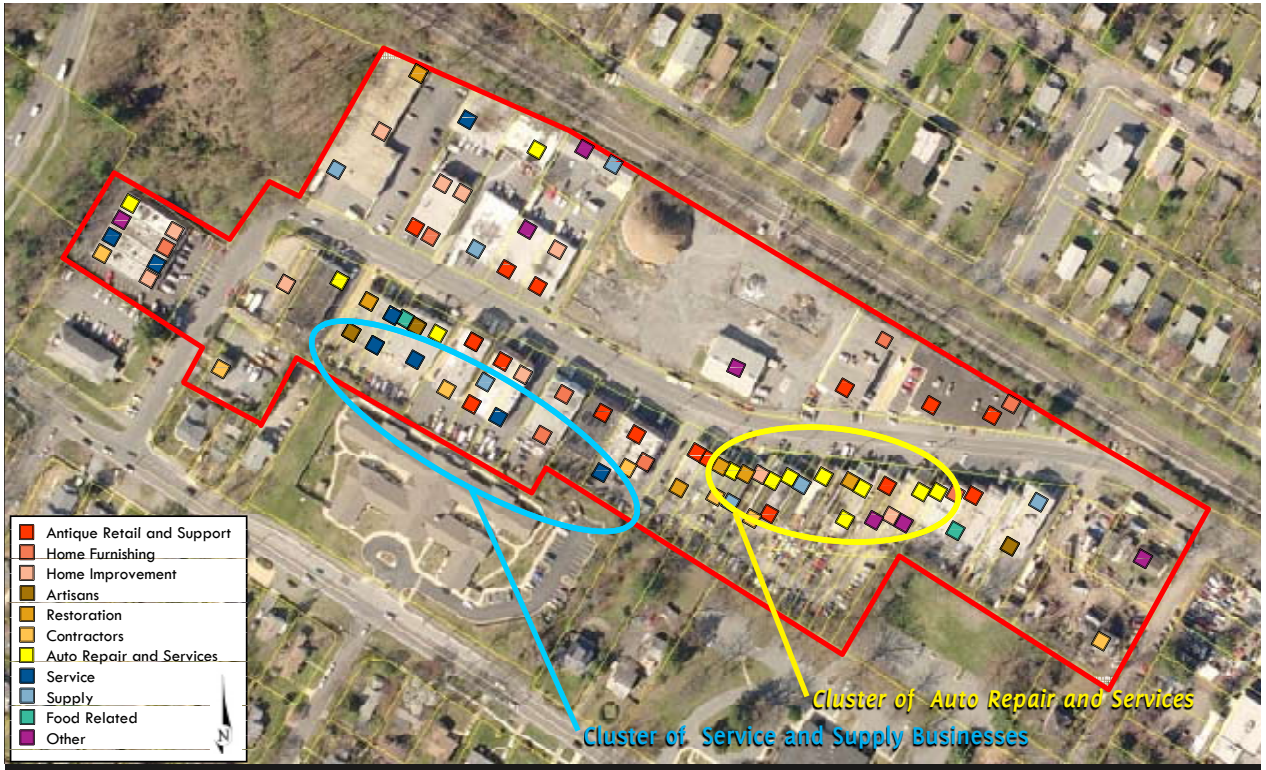
Urban Design

The approved Sector Plan identifies some basic urban design challenges and strategies for West Howard Avenue. The Sector Plan recognizes the lack of separation between parking and street, indicating this to be a hazardous condition for walking. The Sector Plan further suggests improvements to enhance the scale and character of the area through coordinated signage and facade treatments.



Note: Diagram is an Interpretation of Right-of-Way Expansion from Adopted Sector Plan for the Town of Kensington

Current Sector Plan Road Recommendation- Arterial Road: 80 Ft Row Assumed



Business Types Diagram

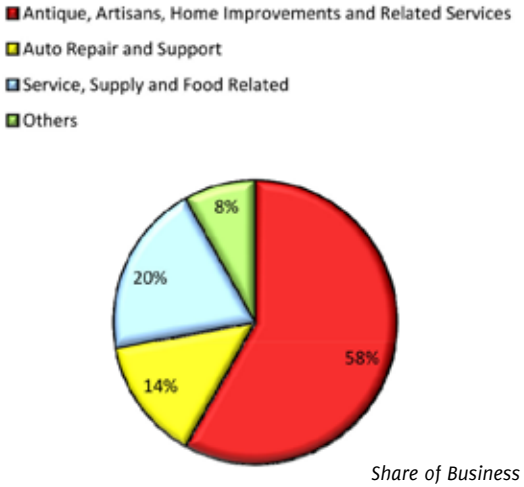
| BUSINESS TYPES |

Along West Howard Avenue there are approximately 86 businesses. The businesses contained in these buildings provide an eclectic mix of products and services ranging from auto-oriented establishments to antique shops.

A majority of businesses (58%) have a potential synergistic relationship with the antique retail market. These businesses include home furnishings, home improvement artisans and restoration businesses.

Other business groupings include service and supply businesses, such as general contractors, catering businesses, and building product suppliers.

The auto-related businesses make up a 14% share of overall businesses. However, these active businesses have a strong visual presence, as they require large exterior parking spaces for storage and staging of vehicles.



Share of Business Types

Antique, Artisan and Home Improvement and Related Services

Service, Supply and Food Related

Auto Repair and Support

Others (Pet Grooming)

| Architectural Observations of Existing Buildings |

The buildings within the study area were primarily built from the 1950s through the 1970s and are a simple reflection of an industrial style of architecture. Typically, they are unadorned and principally utilitarian. Building heights vary, but are generally two stories. Access is generally from both the front and back of the structures. Grade conditions allow some buildings to be two stories where fronting West Howard Avenue and only one story at the rear of the buildings. The steep topography creates accessibility constraints for those who are physically disabled. While most businesses are entered at grade level, some are elevated and are only accessible by stairs.

Building exterior walls are primarily comprised of masonry in the form of brick or concrete block. A majority of the buildings along the west end of the study area have relatively flat facades and have similar setbacks from West Howard Avenue. The building facades along the east end tend to be more pronounced and step back from one another in a regular pattern. Many of the facades along Howard Avenue have been painted, or parged and then painted. There is evidence of cosmetic deterioration and minor structural compromise in some instances. These instances are usually found around loading dock openings which are prone to damage from delivery trucks or at the base of buildings where moisture penetration is evident. However, there does not appear to be any major structural damage within the exterior masonry walls.

Building openings (windows and doors) vary and include storefront, double-hung and fixed glazing windows, as well as passenger and roll-up garage doors. The rhythm of solid-to-void (the relationship between walls and their openings such as windows and doors) is repeated in buildings of similar size and footprint. The ratio tends to be predominantly more solid than void. With the exception of a few businesses that take advantage of large amounts of glazing at the first floor level, most interior spaces are not likely benefiting from an adequate amount of natural daylight or the marketing potential that exists from a street level perspective. A large amount of the glazing in these buildings is single pane and frequently contains air-conditioning units. These conditions typically exacerbate air leakage, infiltration and energy loss. Utility boxes and connections are typically mounted to the front façade surfaces.

The roof structures are mostly low-sloped membrane roofs with overflow scuppers and downspouts that drain at surface grade.

Site lighting along this portion of Howard Avenue relies on standard cobra-head fixtures, with sodium vapor or high pressure sodium lighting fixtures. Exterior building lighting is minimal, and is commonly found in the form of flood lighting near entry doors. Other surface-mounted components include signage and graphics. There is a lack of prescribed standards for lighting and signage. The type of signage varies from business to business and includes surface-mounted painted plywood, vinyl banners, movable sandwich boards, vinyl lettering, neon and graphics on awnings. Most of these signs are in need of repair or replacement.

In summary, there are multiple architectural items that need attention including the following-- unappealing and deteriorating facades, lack of controlled rain water management, excessive surface mounted components, lack of building and site lighting, and lack of graphic signage standards all detract from the visual appearance of the buildings. Consequently, the overall architectural character is compromised and in need of revitalization.

Key Plan of Typical Facade Studies

Summary of Architectural Observations

Accessibility
- Inadequate accessible route
- Pedestrian safety concerns

Structural Deterioration
- Visible weaknesses in masonry walls, glazing components, water damage

Cosmetic Deterioration
- Peeling paint

Surface mounted components
- Utility meters and boxes, downspouts are visually unappealing

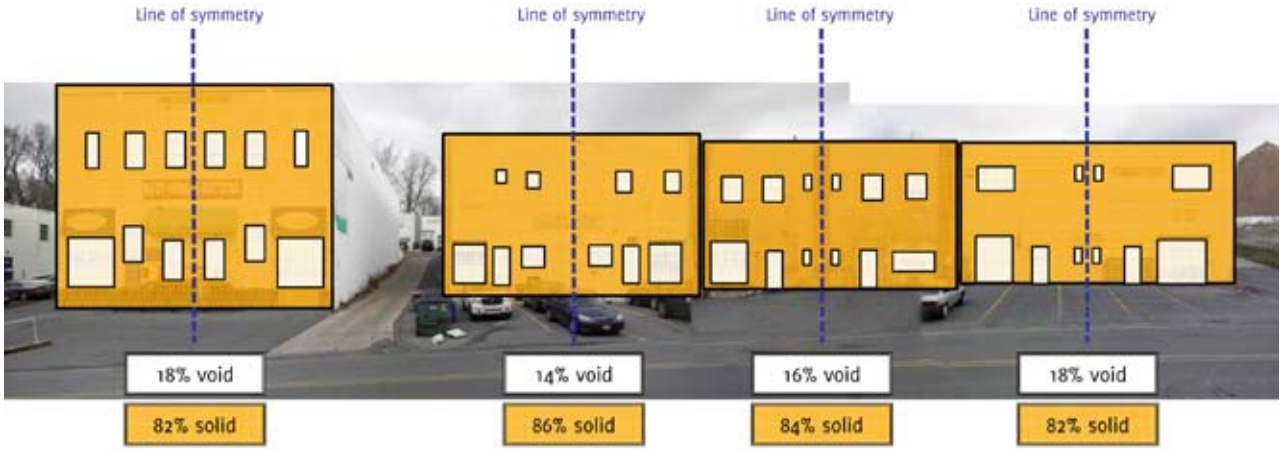
Lighting
- Surface mounted flood lighting at entry doors, few decorative sconces
- Inadequate street lighting

Signage
- Lack of prescribed standards, often in need of rep replacement

Colors
- Very little color variation, muted colors

| Building Group 1 |

Existing Facade Condition



Solid-Void Ratio Diagram

Architecture Style

- Circa 1963-1964 Industrial

Building Characteristics

- Masonry Facades, primarily flush, minimal stepping
- Fenestration types include double hung windows, storefront glazing, passenger door, roll-up garage door
- Roof is low-sloped membrane with overflow scuppers and downspouts
- Electrical boxes and gas meters are surface mounted
- Canvas awnings
- Metal or concrete stairs to upper level building entry
- Loading docks

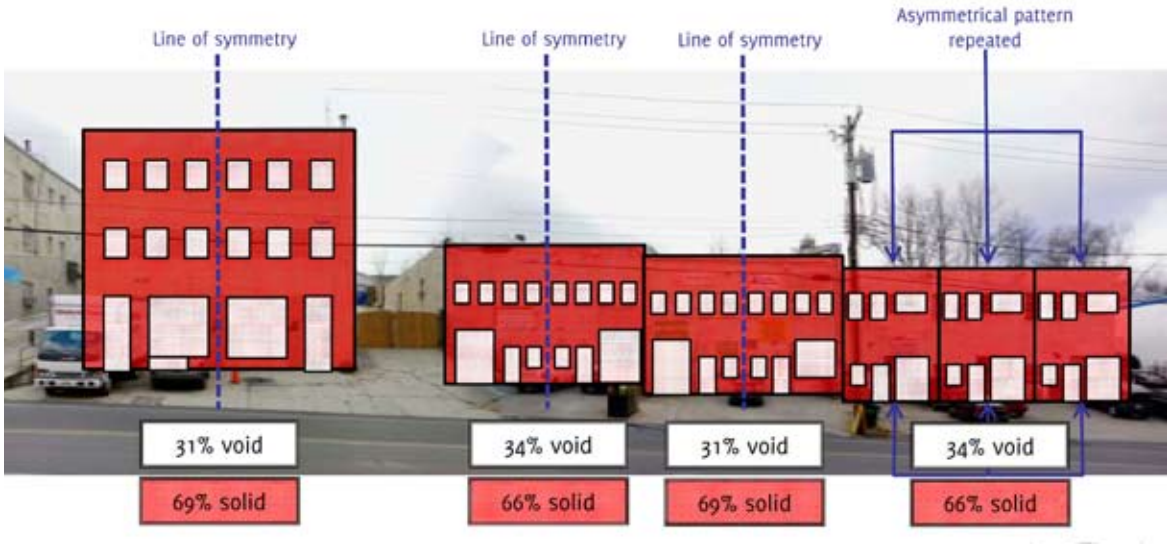
Signage

- Surface mounted painted plywood, vinyl banners, awnings graphics, vinyl lettering

Lighting

- Surface mounted flood lighting at entry doors, decorative sconces

Existing Facade Condition



Solid-Void Ratio Diagram

Architecture Style

- Circa 1961-1972 Industrial

Building Characteristics

- Masonry Façades, flush.
- Fenestration types include double hung windows, storefront glazing, passenger door, roll-up garage doors.
- Roof is low-sloped membrane with overflow scuppers and downspouts.
- Electrical meters and metal conduit are surface mounted.

Signage

- Surface mounted painted plywood, vinyl banners, movable sandwich boards, vinyl lettering, neon

Lighting

- Surface mounted flood lighting at entry doors

| Building Group 3 |

Existing Facade Condition

Architecture Style

- circa1959 Industrial

Building Characteristics

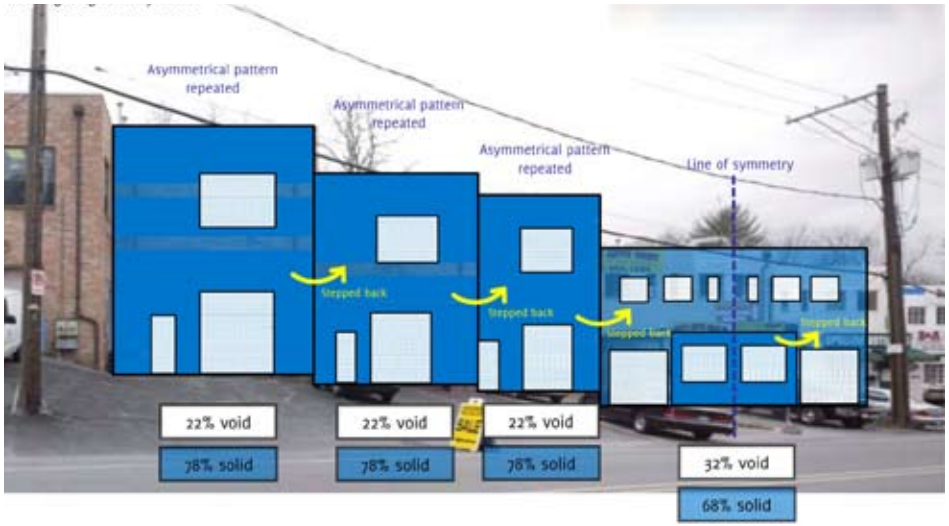
- Masonry Façades, stepped back +/- 10’ to 12’ in a regular pattern.
- Fenestration types include storefront glazing, passenger door and roll-up garage doors.
- Roof is low-sloped membrane with overflow scuppers and downspouts.
- Electrical meters and metal conduit are surface mounted.

Signage

- Surface mounted painted plywood, vinyl banners, movable sandwich boards

Lighting

- Surface mounted flood lighting at entry doors



Solid-Void Ratio Diagram

Existing Tree in Parking Lot

Some Recycling Bins

Solar Power on Vent

Environmental Impact Analysis

When this industrial area was built in the mid-twentieth century, the environmental impacts of the built environment were not a major consideration. While there are signs of growing environmental stewardship like rainwater collection and solar powered venting, the existing environmental conditions could be improved.

Overall there is a lack of landscaping and pervious surfaces. The lack of trees offer little opportunity for shading and natural cooling of the environment The ubiquitous impervious surfaces (parking and service areas) fail to permit rain water from naturally recharging into the earth, instead forcing runoff to flow unmitigated, delivering collected pollutants, to nearby tributaries (Rock Creek). Within the study area, there are few examples of controlling the quantity or quality of runoff.

The buildings were built for industrial uses during a time period when ventilation and energy efficiency was not a standard practice. These buildings lack insulation and have not upgraded mechanical systems to improve energy efficiencies. Additionally windows are single pane, a major source of lost energy. The potentially noxious materials used by certain businesses pose issues for indoor air quality of tenants.

While dumpsters are common fixtures, recycling containers are less visible. This indicates that recycling may be under-utilized. Local businesses may need to request a service contract with a recycling provider, such as Waste Managment.

Summary

- Mostly impervious surfaces, resulting in uncontrolled runoff to Rock Creek Park
- Lack of landscaping
- Lack of water quality controls
- Possible contaminant runoff
- Building energy inefficiency
- Poor indoor air quality related to noxious land uses
- Apparent lack of recycling


FAREAST ANTIQUES

A new vision for West Howard Avenue:

A viable "place" that is functional, maintains the eclectic uses and is forward thinking without dismissing the industrial flavor of its past.

Design & Vision Recommendations

| Distinctive Character |

West Howard Avenue is a distinct place in the heart of Montgomery County. Unlike the antique and boutique shops in old Kensington, where the streets and buildings are historic and quaint, West Howard is rugged and industrial. This unique setting offers the potential for a distinctive brand of local businesses. However, structures and the site as a whole are showing their age and their need for upgrades. Physical improvements to the facades and streetscape offer opportunities to capture the electic spirit of this industrial place.

This study provides recommendations and visual references of key features to guide improvements that ensure the distinctive industrial character of West Howard Avenue is not lost.

| Balance Circulation |

West Howard Avenue is heavily characterized by its vehicular and service needs. Where topography permits, vehicles have unlimited access to properties along West Howard Avenue. The unorganized mixing of services, parking and through-traffic creates a confusing environment with potential points of conflict. Through-traffic along West Howard appears fast and is potentially dangerous where sight distances are limited. Pedestrians have the fewest opportunities and amenities. As noted in the Approved Sector Plan and confirmed by this study, pedestrian safety needs to be addressed.

This study provides recommendations to restructure West Howard Avenue to meet County standards, provide a safer place for pedestrians, and to meet existing and future parking needs.

| Environmental Stewardship |

As a result of this area's industrial heritage, West Howard Avenue is distinctively "grey." Surface areas are predominantly impervious. The runoff from these surfaces has potential negative impacts on the health of the Rock Creek. Building technology and construction has come a long way since the mid-twentieth century. Today, buildings can achieve greater energy and water efficiency, encourage healthy places for people and minimize their impact on the land. As West Howard's buildings receive upgrades, environmental stewardship should guide these improvements.

This study provides recommendations to implement stormwater strategies that mitigate runoff, both on public land and private land. Additionally, this study provides recommendations for building improvements to encourage energy-efficiency and healthier spaces to work.

Monterrey, CA

Baltimore, MD

Baltimore, MD


Baltimore, MD

I DISTINCTIVE CHARACTER I

Site and building improvements should reinforce the industrial character of the West Howard Antiques District to strengthen its unique spirit and sense of place. Within the industrial architectural language, building facades should encourage eclecticism and individuality to reflect the diversity of businesses. At the same time, site and landscape improvements should be used to help unify and brand the business community.

The following pages illustrate goals and Recommendations to enhance the character of West Howard.

- ›› Lighting
- ›› Building Awnings
- ›› Building Signage
- ›› Focal Points
- ›› Street & site Signage
- ›› Pedestrian Amenities
- ›› Trash & Storage Containment

The following character recommendations are designed to help stakeholders visualize potential material ideas to develop a strong sense of identity and place. While building facade improvement recommendations are focused on three building groups, they are intended to appy to all buildings along West Howard Avenue.

›› Lighting

Bel Mar, CO

Baltimore, MD

Contemporary Lighting Fixture Family

GOAL›› *Develop a site lighting strategy that unifies and enhances the industrial and contemporary character of West Howard Avenue and provides appropriate illumination for the safety of all users.*

Recommendations

1. Introduce a common industrial language among street lighting fixtures to unify West Howard Avenue and service drives. Preference should be given to full cut off luminaries, which do project light upwards and energy-efficient street light fixtures.

2. Provide appropriate illumination for vehicles and pedestrians. Introduce pedestrian scale lighting to better illuminate pedestrian movement along West Howard Avenue and between buildings and parking areas.

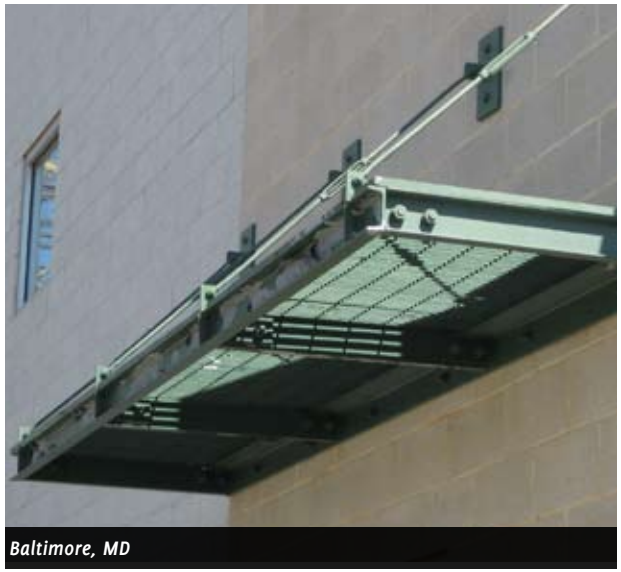
3. Locate lighting fixtures to reinforce public spaces, such as along the storefronts, or overhanging the street and service lanes.

4. Locate accent lighting to create interest and visual focus on prominent focal points, such as building signage.

Austin, TX

Los Angeles, CA

›› Building Awnings


Baltimore, MD

GOAL›› *Install awnings that reinforce the industrial character of West Howard Avenue, provide relief and scale to the building facades, accentuate and protect building entries, and provide solar shading.*

Recommendations

1. Encourage the installation of a variety of awnings throughout the study area to celebrate individual businesses and buildings.

2. Install awnings that best support the industrial character-

   a. Industrial awnings- constructed of raw materials, such as metal, and demonstrating how materials are assembled.

   b. Contemporary awnings- minimalist and simple forms to correspond to the simple forms of the existing buildings

3. Locate awnings at building entries to define business storefronts and their counterpart pedestrian areas in front of entries.

>> Building Signage

Los Angeles, CA

Baltimore, MD


Baltimore, MD

Goal>> *Install building signage that celebrates the industrial character of West Howard Avenue and reinforces the individuality of each business.*

Recommendations

1. Display business names and logos using durable signage materials and methods.

2. Encourage a variety of sign types and sizes to help reinforce the eclectic nature of this business community. Example of signs include but are not limited to the following: superscript lettering painted on the building facades, neon backlit metal lettering and wall-hung sign boards.

3. Develop a standard system to prominently display building address numbers. This layer of signage provides order among the variety of businesses and helps people locate their destination.

.

Pasadena, CA

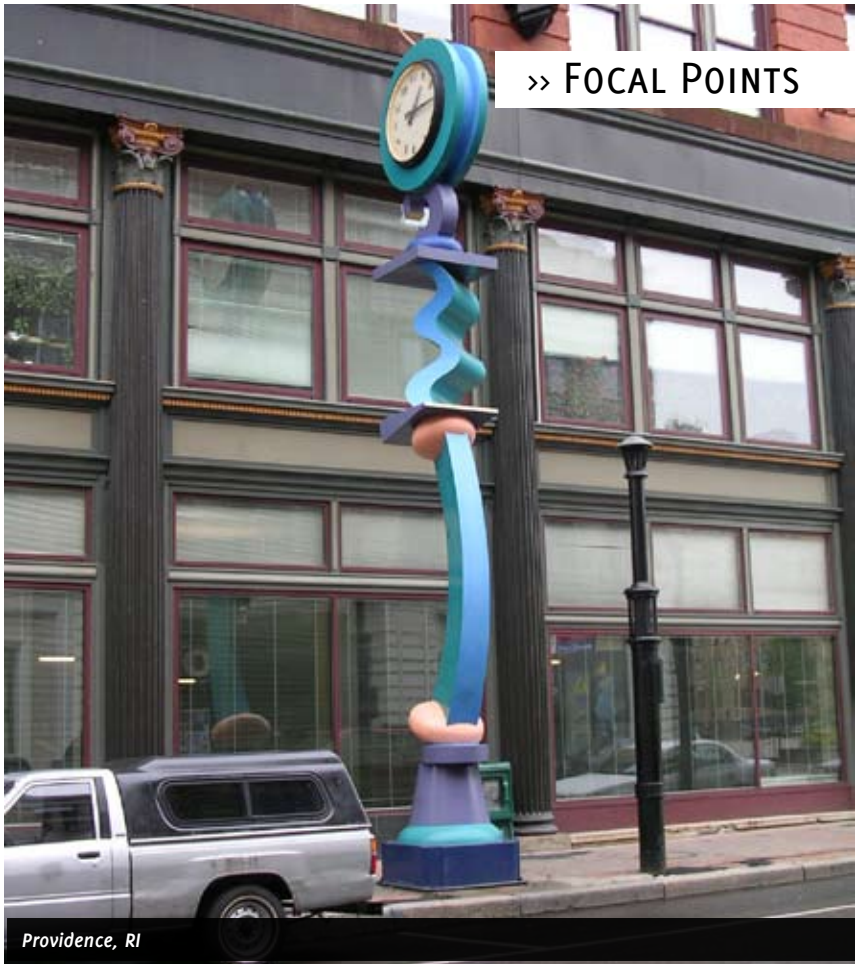
GOAL›› *Enhance the sense of arrival into the West Howard Avenue business community.*

RECOMMENDATIONS

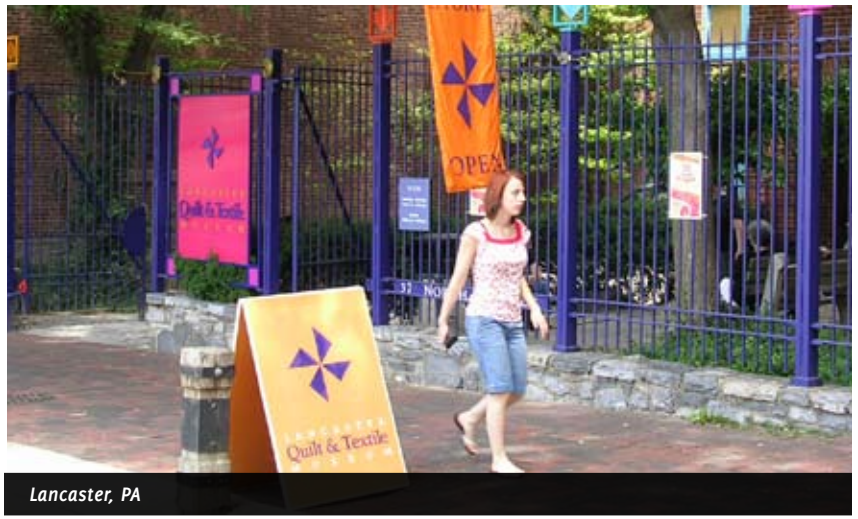
1. Develop gateway features to identify the entrance to West Howard Avenue.

2. Create a shared public space that fosters a sense of community and identity among the many businesses.

›› FOCAL POINTS



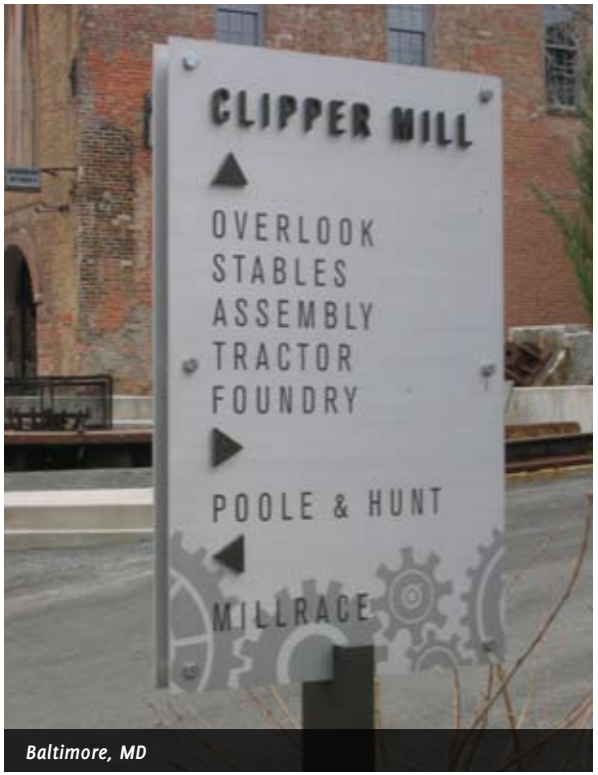
Providence, RI



Lancaster, PA

›› Site Signage

Pasadena, CA



Baltimore, MD

Zip-Car

Goal›› *Provide signs that unify and brand the business community, enhancing West Howard Avenue's image, while providing clarity for circulation and wayfinding.*

Recommendations

1. Develop branded signage that identifies site features, introduces color and texture, and unifies West Howard Avenue. The signage may be adaptive for seasonal or special events.

2. Develop pedestrian-scaled, wayfinding signage that reflects the industrial nature of business activities.

3. Use signage to clarify the location of parking, delivery and service spaces.

›› Pedestrian Amenities

Lancaster, PA

Goal›› *Develop a safe and comfortable pedestrian streetscape and network.*

Durham, NC

Portland, OR

Recommendations

1. Use curbs, bollards and other landscape features to create buffers between pedestrians and automobiles. Where a clear separation between pedestrians and vehicles is not possible, such as at crosswalks, introduce material changes and signage to bring awareness to motorists of pedestrians.

2. Strategically locate pedestrian amenities, such as benches and trash receptacles to provide some basic comforts for people.

3. Introduce landscape and streetscape elements that are finely scaled and detailed to attract interest to passer-bys.

4. Provide street trees where possible.

›› Trash & Storage Containment

Baltimore, MD

Bel Mar, CO

Ornamental Screen

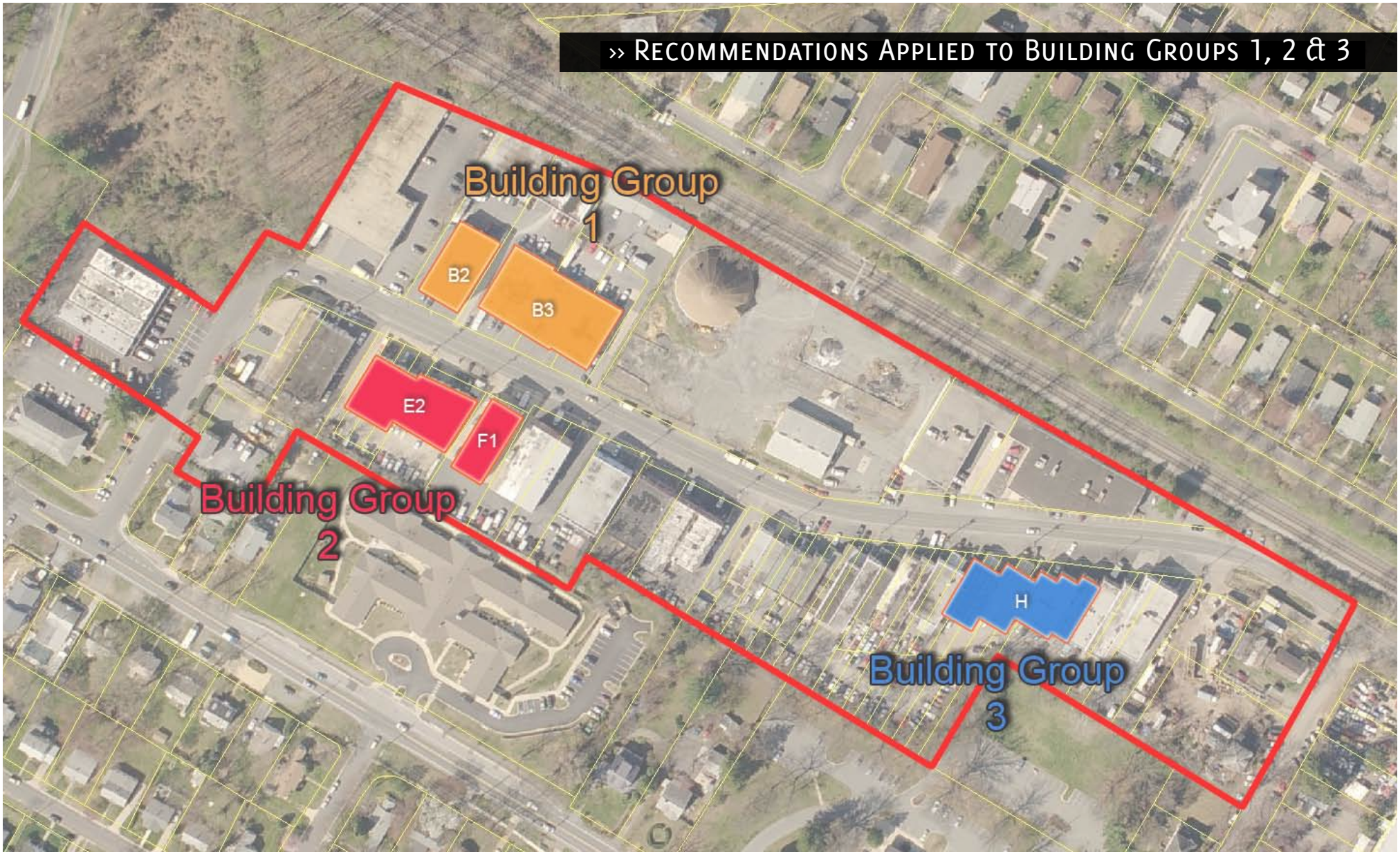
Recommendations

1. Relocate dumpsters, where possible, away from West Howard Avenue to adjacent service drives, placing these facilities out of sight from immediate view of the public, but within proximate distance of the businesses they serve.

2. Develop screened enclosures to hide trash and storage facilities. Screens should enhance the industrial character through the use of articulated joints, common industrial materials or a high level of craft.

3. Develop standardized trash receptacles and corral facilities in strategic locations that are convenient but does not obstruct pedestrian and vehicular movement.

Goal›› *Develop strategies to mitigate the unsightliness of trash and storage facilities located along West Howard Avenue, but within range to keep these facilities useful to existing and future businesses.*


›› Recommendations Applied to Building Groups 1, 2 & 3
Building Group 1
B2
B3
E2
F1
Building Group 2
H
Building Group 3

›› Recommendations Applied to Building Group 1

Existing Condition

Option 1

Option 2

Recommendations

1. Superscript Address Signage- Bold and large lettering painted on the buildng's surface to provide clear indication of the building's location, and echo industrial era traditions.

2. Business Signage- Introduce smaller scale signs to address businesses.

3. Paint Facades- Paint facades in soft earth tones. Breakup the buildings' mass by introducing a secondary color to define individual storefront.

4. Raised Sidewalk- Elevate the building apron to provide a continuous pedestrian walk along the front of a group of buildings. Make entrances accessible by connecting the elevated sidewalk to the higher elevated building corner.

5. Textured Guardrails and Railings- Install railings that articulate their assembly of parts and constructed of common industrial materials such as steel.

6. Canopies- Design and install canopies that reinforce the pedestrian scale, and define business store fronts.

7. Building Lighting- Install lighting along the front of businesses to illuminate storefront and pedestrian walk.

8. Pedestrian/Landscape Amenities- Provide matching benches, trash receptacles and planter boxes along the front of the buildings to enhance the pedestrian experience.

The recommendations listed above are an outline of facade improvements that may be employed on other buildings in the West Howard Avenue study area.

›› Recommendations Applied to Building Group 2

Existing Condition

Option 1

Option 2

Recommendations

1. Painted Logos: Paint business logos onto facades.
2. Color : Paint facades using cool and bright colors.
3. Accent Lighting: Enhance the visibility of business signage by using backlighting, neon lighting or direct lighting.
4. Signage: Apply signage to the facade to bring order and break down the scale of buildings. Signs can range from simple metallic letters to durable (metal, or high-quality fabrics and plastics) sign boards with graphic imagery and text.
5. Cornice Line: Apply a contrasting and darker color to the cap of the building, distinguishing the upper edge of the building from the sky.
6. Canopies: Place canopies over store fronts and doors to reinforce frontage and add order to the facade.

The recommendations listed above are an outline of facade improvements that may be employed on other buildings in the West Howard Avenue study area.

>> Recommendations Applied to Building Group 3

Existing Condition

Option 1

Option 2

Recommendations

1. Signage: Apply superscript address numbers vertically on the building to contrast the horizontal nature of existing windows. Animate signs with vivid and bright colors and lighting to contrast the dark brick.

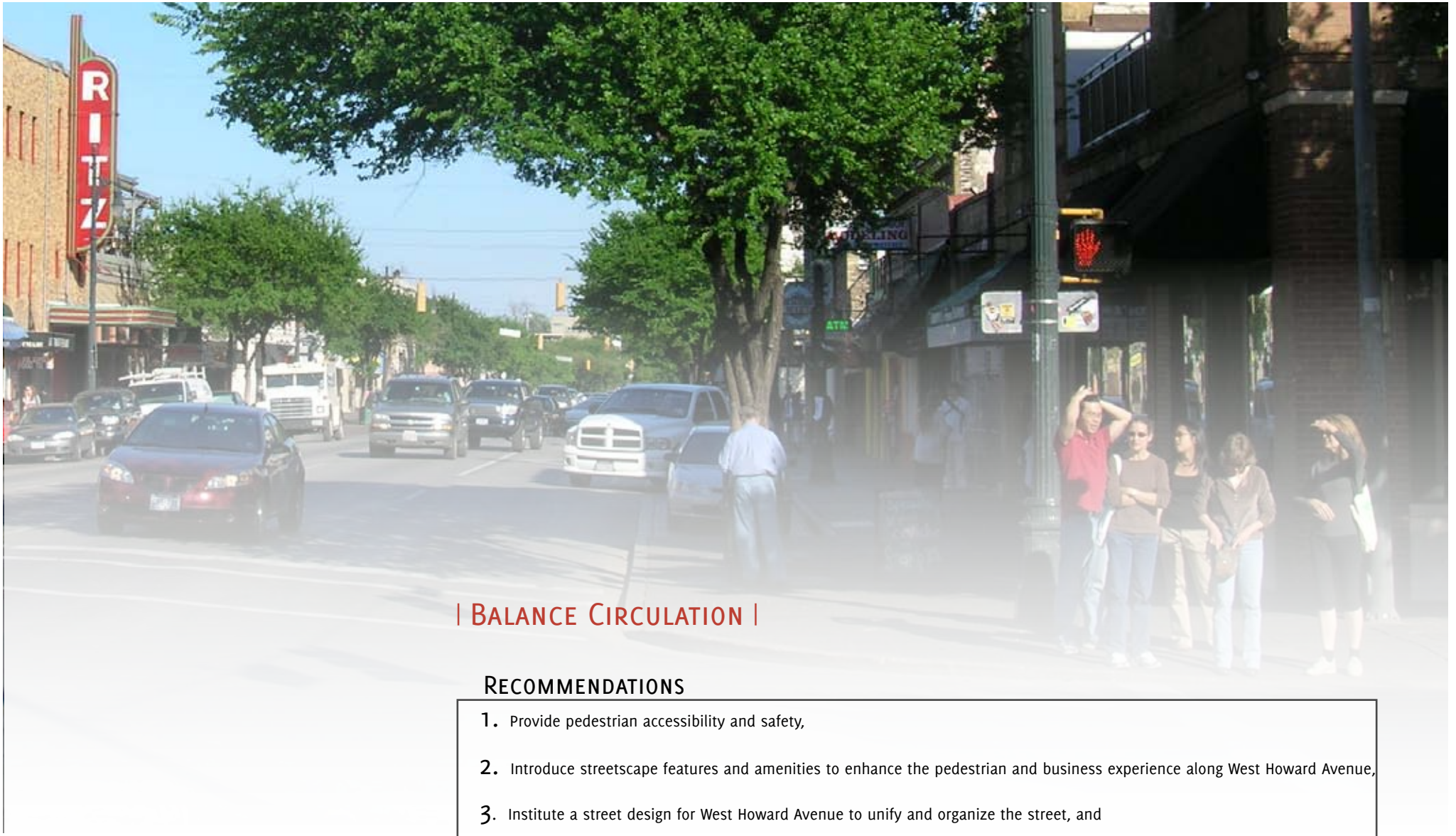
2. Brick: Repair and clean brick to express its natural color. This is most applicable to structures whose brick is in good condition and have an interesting color.

3. Canopy: Align canopy over storefront windows and entry doors, enhancing the human scale and unifying the ground floor businesses.

4. Downspouts: Disconnect downspouts from direct runoff or underground pipes and allow downspouts to hydrate rain gardens or fill rain barrels. Emphasize these vertical elements by exposing their metallic finishes or using a contrasting color.

5. Garage Doors: Replace oqaque doors with glazed doors to enlarge business transparency to the street. Where possible, replace garage doors with a storefront glazing system to provide better insulation.

The recommendations listed above are an outline of facade improvements that may be employed on other buildings in the West Howard Avenue study area..



| Balance Circulation |

Recommendations

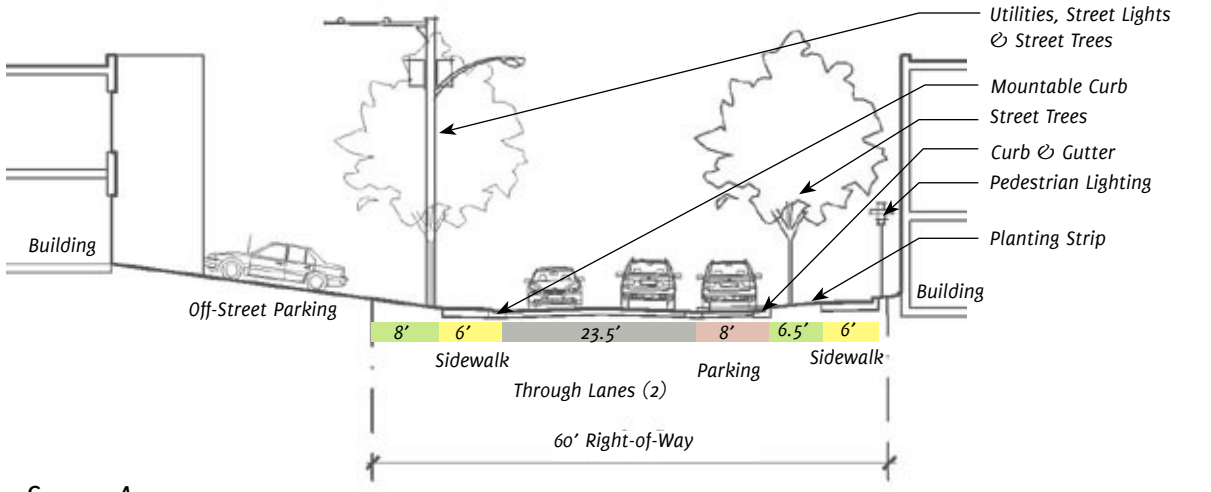
1. Provide pedestrian accessibility and safety,
2. Introduce streetscape features and amenities to enhance the pedestrian and business experience along West Howard Avenue,
3. Institute a street design for West Howard Avenue to unify and organize the street, and
4. Balance vehicular circulation, service access and parking needs.


Extend sidewalks to the south and connect with Knowles Avenue and east to connect with Connecticut Avenue.
Provide safe pedestrian sidewalks parallel to West Howard Avenue, as recommended in the County's context sensitive street design standards.
Plan Enlargement B
Make pedestrian routes accessible, introduce curb cuts, and ramps to access sidewalks and businesses.
Provide clear and highly visible crosswalks at key locations and intersections.
Introduce signage to calm through traffic and provide a mid-block pedestrian crossing.
Encourage owners to provide a designated safe and comfortable pedestrian area in front of business entries.
Plan Enlargement A
Gateway: locate entrance signage and accent landscape features to create a sense of arrival.
Unified Street: plant street trees consistently along the north side of West Howard Avenue to unify the street and provide shade and comfort to pedestrians.
Focal Points: locate signage, artwork, accent landscape features to enhance the approach to businesses.
Focal Points: locate signage, artwork, accent landscape features to enhance the approach to businesses.
Gateway: locate entrance signage and accent landscape features to create a sense of arrival.
N

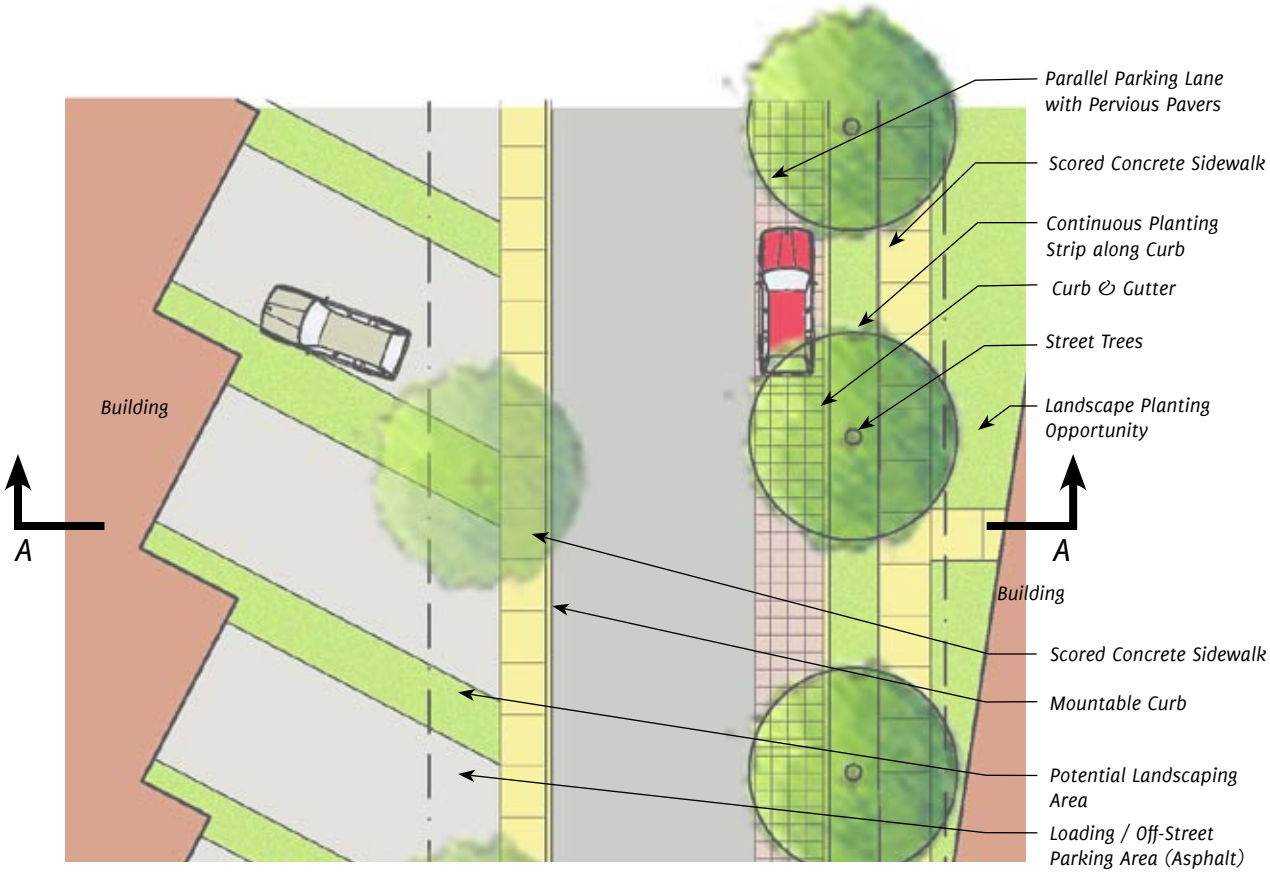
>> Street Design Recommendations

This study recommends a new street design that unifies the character of West Howard Avenue, accounts for the functional needs, provides opportunities for storm water management, and minimizes the need for additional right-of-way aquistion. This study recommends implementing Montgomery County's Context Senstive Road Design Standard number 2005.01, and modifying certain elements. This standard utilizes a 60-foot right-of-way, accomodates parallel parking, pedestrian sidewalks and a landscape strip for trees. Some stormwater management facilities can be acommodated within the right-of-way. Additionally, this right-of-way has minimal impact to private properties with regard to right-of-way acquistion.

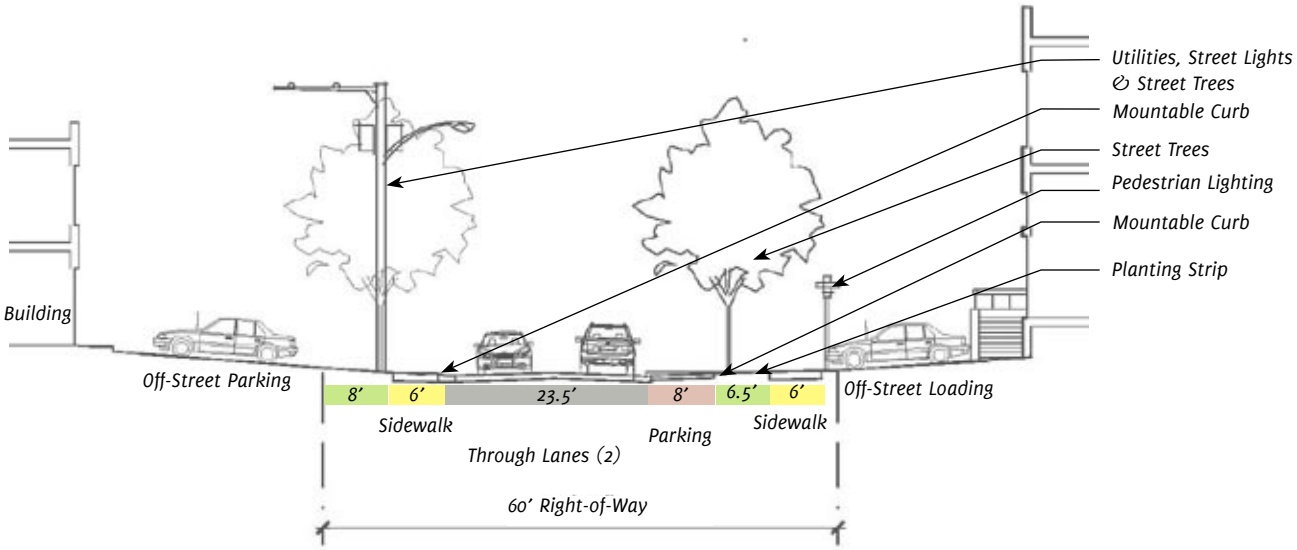
The 60-foot context sensitive road standard is applicable along West Howard Avenue and Warfield Street. This study recommends modifying the street section in the central portion of West Howard Avenue to better meet the needs of businesses and services along the southern side of this avenue. The southern side of the street requires a mountable curb to permit vehicles to access buildings directly from the street. Instead of a continuous planting strip, smaller strips would be used to protect utilities, provide for biofilitration and introduce potential trees. The northern side of the street would retain the road standard's pedestrian area and planting layout.



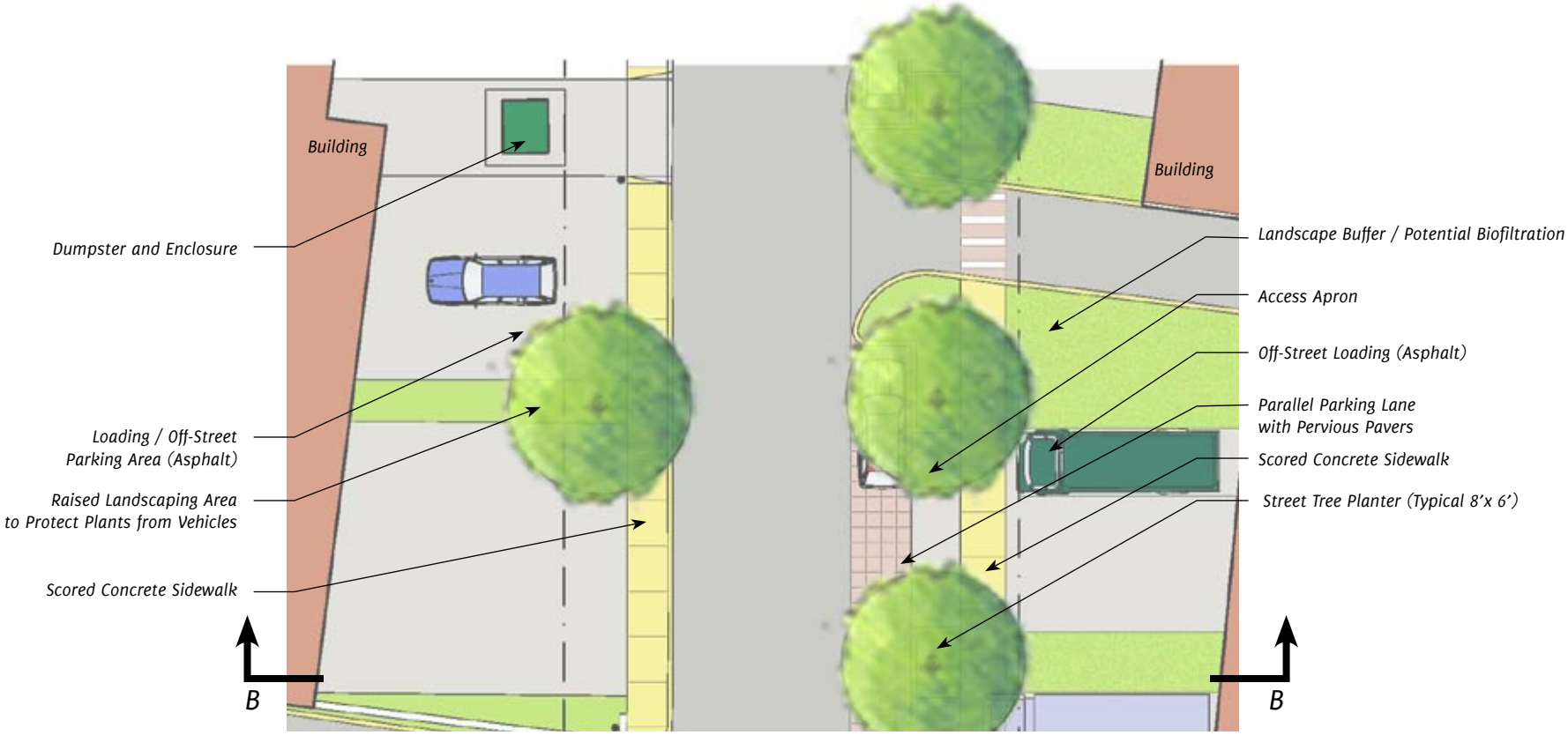
Section A



Plan Enlargement A



SECTION B



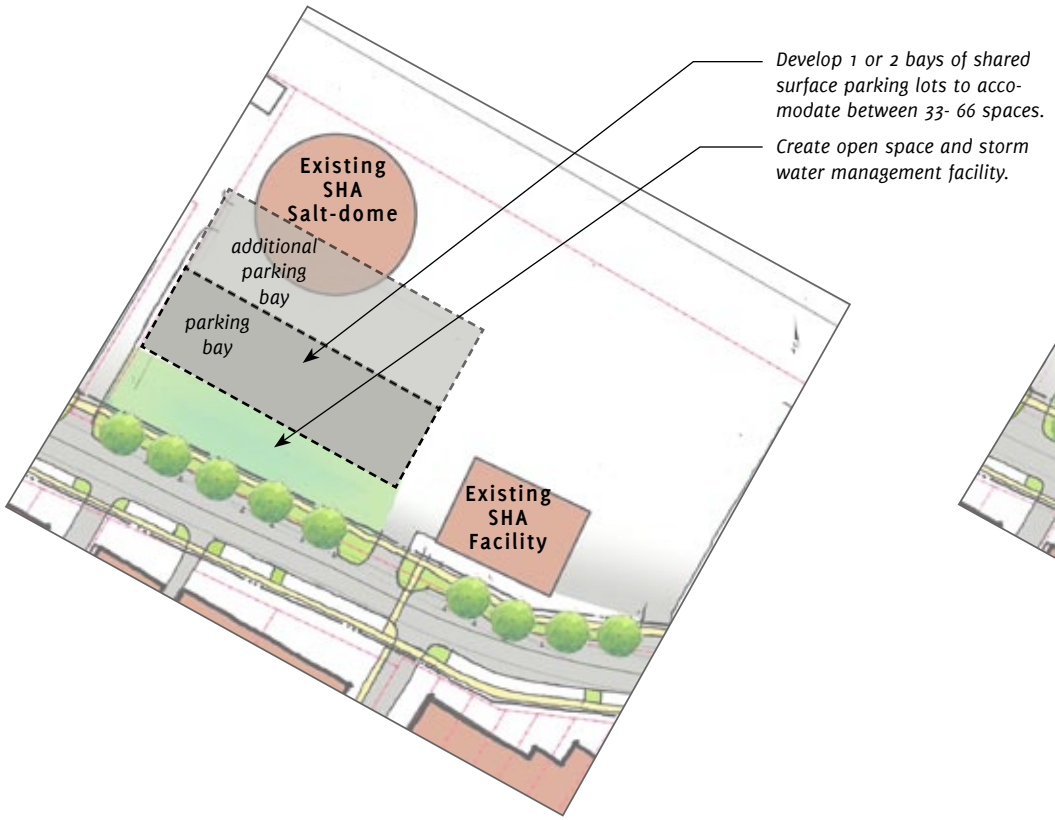
PLAN ENLARGEMENT B

›› Circulation, Service Access & Parking Recommendations

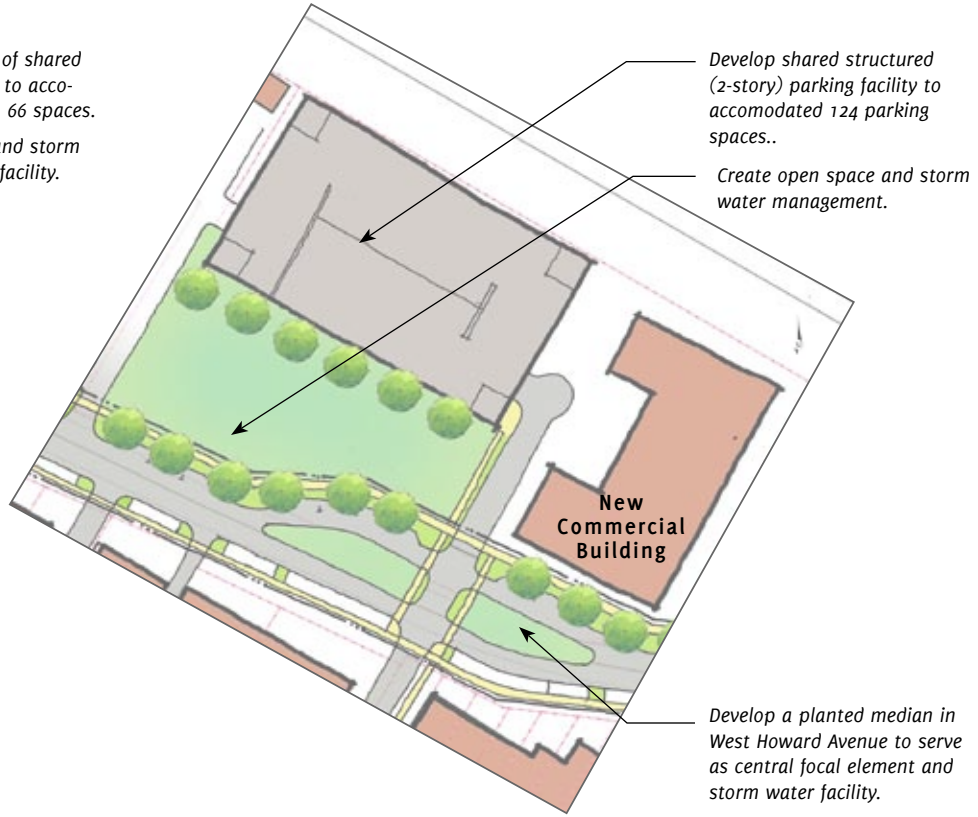
On-Street Parking-		± 54 Spaces
Off-Street Parking-		± 421 Spaces
	Total	± 475 Spaces

Proposed Parking

In summary, the reorganization of West Howard Avenue gains clear, better distributed and designated on-street parking spaces (+21 spaces), at the cost of overall parking spaces (-59 spaces). Potential redevelopment sites, such as the SHA Site, provide opportunities to meet parking deficits as well as provide additional shared parking in the future.



Potential Redevelopment of the SHA Property- Concept A



Potential Redevelopment of the SHA Property- Concept B

>> Potential Redevelopment of the SHA Property

In the event of full or partial redevelopment of the SHA property, the site offers West Howard Avenue an opportunity to increase parking supply, gain open space amenities, provide stormwater facilities, and create new commercial uses. Additionally, the redevelopment of the SHA site may allow for the widening of West Howard Avenue to create a focal landscape median at the heart of this business community. The above concept plans offer vision for the redevelopment of this property and West Howard Avenue.

Constructed Wetland (Portland, OR)

Permeable Pavers

Rain Garden

›› Stormwater Management

Goal›› *Develop site and building strategies to reduce the impact of stormwater runoff.*

Recommendations

1. Reduce surface imperviousness by introducing planting areas along West Howard Avenue and integrating planter boxes where removing the hardscape is not feasible.

2. Develop comprehensive stormwater management strategy within the street right-of-way with:.
   - Sand Filter- locate beneath streets
   - Permeable Pavers- locate in areas of minimal impact, such as in areas for parking spaces
   - Biofiltration- locate along West Howard to serve both as a landscape and stormwater feature
   - Oversized pipes- locate beneath streets

3. Encourage off-site strategies to mitigate of stormwater runoff:
   - Rain gardens
   - Redirect downspouts to pervious areas
   - Green roof treatments

Green Roof

Conveyance

Bioinfiltration

Drain to Underground Storage

>> Stormwater management recommendations

Bike Storage Facilities

Native Plants

Install Energy Efficient Lighting Fixtures

Preferential Parking for Hybrid & Shared Vehicles

›› Building Efficiency & Sustainability

Goal›› *Encourage building owners to upgrade their buildings to improve energy effieciency, water efficiency and indoor air quality, and to conserve natural resources.*

Recommendations

1. Site:
   - Prevent air and water pollution during remodeling and renovation activities
   - Make pedestrian connections to the community and other developments in the area
   - Support alternative transportation by: Connecting to public transportation, providing bicycle storage and connections to bike trails, and by providing preferred parking for fuel efficient vehicles, carpooling and shared cars (like Zip Car)
   - Reduce the heat island effect through reflective roofs and paving that is shaded, pervious or reflective.
   - Reduce light pollution and trespass with full cut off street light fixtures

2. Water:
   - Use drought resistant landscaping that requires no or little irrigation
   - Install low flow plumbing fixtures

3. Energy:
   - Perform energy audits or retro-commissioning to evaluate performance
   - Increase efficiency of building envelope
     - Seal leaks
     - Increase insulation in walls and roofs
     - Install efficient glazing in windows and skylights
   - Increase efficiency of lighting and controls
   - Increase efficiency of HVAC systems, equipment, and appliances

4. Materials:
   - Divert remodeling and renovation waste from landfills
   - Provide space for recycling collection and encourage businesses to participate in recycling pick-up services
   - Install materials and products that are salvaged, regional, rapidly renewing, sustainably harvested or have recycled content.

5. Indoor Environment:
   - Install low emitting (no- to low-VOC) materials
   - Allow user control of lighting and thermal comfort
   - Provide daylight and views to exterior

References & Resources

Planning:

Adoption of Context Sensitive Road Design Standards. Montgomery County, Department of Transportation. 9.30.08.

Approved and Adopted Sector Plan for the Town of Kensington and Vicinity, Montgomery County, Maryland. Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, May 1978.

Approved and Adopted Ammendment to the Sector Plan for The Town of Kensington and Vicinity and to the Master Plan for Kensington-Wheaton Planning Area VII. Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, September 1986.

Developing a Revitalization Strategy for the Town of Kensington, A Technical Assistance Panel Report. Urban Land Institute, Washington, sponsored by Town of Kensington, Maryland, November 2008.

General Press:

Off the Beaten Path, Kensington. Washington Post, Tania Anderson. Feb 7, 2008.

Sustainability:

LEED-NC, United States Green Building Council. 2009.

DC Greenworks- www.dcgreenworks.org

NPS Center for Urban Ecology- www.nps.gov/cue

Acknowledgements

The consultant team would like to thank the following individuals for their help and direction in preparing this study. Special thanks to all of the stakeholder participants who attended the public meetings and provided valuable feedback for the future of West Howard Avenue.

Montgomery County Council

George Leventhal, Councilman, At-Large

Town of Kensington

Peter Fosselman, Mayor

Claudia Donnelly, Special Assistant to the Mayor

Montgomery County Departments

Lester Brantner, Department of Housing and Community Affairs

Cathy Mahmud, Department of Housing and Community Affairs

Michael Mitchell, Department of Transportation

Roylene Roberts, Department of Housing and Community Affairs

Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission

Fred Boyd, Vision Division

Tina Schneider, Environmental Planning

David Paine, Transportation Planning

Consultant Team

Miguel Iraola, Hord Coplan Macht

Monica Robertson, Hord Coplan Macht

Matthew Fitzsimmons, Hord Coplan Macht

Tom Holdsworth, Hord Coplan Macht

Kallie Sternburgh, Hord Coplan Macht

Steve Goley, Loiederman Soltesz Associates